# Purpose and Need for Action

Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

The Caribou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1985) currently directs management of the Curlew National Grassland. Revision of management plans is directed by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), regulations, 36 Code Federal Regulations (CFR) 219 and the Forest Service Directives System (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12)

In a letter to Regional Foresters, dated April 22, 1998, Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck addressed the importance of the National Grassland systems and stated:

> "In recognition of the uniqueness of the national grassland units of the National Forest System (NFS), future land and resource management plan revision efforts will include the preparation of a separate plan for each national grassland or combination of national grassland units under the jurisdiction of a single supervisor. This responds to concerns that national grassland issues receive less attention in the planning process than comparable issues involving national forests."

Instructions for revising management plans found in the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 219.10[g]) state:

> "A forest [and grassland] plan shall ordinarily be revised on a 10-year cycle or at least every 15 years. It also may be revised whenever the Forest supervisor determines that conditions or demands in the area covered by the plan have changed significantly or when changes in RPA [Resources Protection Act] policies, goals or objectives would have a significant effect on forest level programs. In the monitoring and evaluation process, the interdisciplinary team may recommend a revision of the forest plan at any time. Revisions are not effective until considered and approved in accordance with the requirements for the development and approval of a forest [or grassland] plan. The Forest Supervisor shall review the conditions on the land covered by the plan at least every five years to determine whether conditions or demands of the public have changed significantly."

The federally-administered portion of the Curlew National Grassland was acquired under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937. Title 3, Section 31 of the Act states, "The Secretary is authorized and directed to develop a program of land conservation and land utilization in order thereby to correct maladjustments in land use and thus assist in controlling soil erosion, reforestation, preserving natural resources, protecting fish and wildlife, developing and protecting recreational facilities, mitigating floods, preventing impairment of dams and

reservoirs, developing energy resources, conserving surface and subsurface moisture, protecting the watersheds of navigable streams, and protecting the public lands, health, safety, and welfare, but not to build industrial parks or establish private or commercial enterprises."

Titles I, II and IV were repealed by Congress by the Agricultural Act of 1961. P.L. 87-128. Title III, though not repealed, has been amended several times since 1937. In the 1960's, the Secretary of Agriculture issued three administrative orders involving the National Grasslands. The 1963 Order was perhaps the most significant since this order amended the management direction in the preceding two orders. Section 213.1 of the 1963 Order in part states, "The National Grasslands shall be administered under sound and progressive principles of land conservation and multiple use and to promote the development of grassland agriculture and sustained-yield management of the forage, fish and wildlife, timber, water and recreational resources in the areas where the National Grasslands are a part."

The most significant Act affecting the National Grasslands, since the passage of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937, was the enactment of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) in 1976. Among other things, the Act requires the preparation of management plans for all units of the National Forest System of which National Grasslands are a part. In the early days the focus of National grasslands was on the value of stabilized watersheds, the productive use of forage by livestock and the relationships of both to rural community stability. Since then, many other values have been added - oil, gas, uranium, and coal; open space vistas; cultural resources; recreation opportunities; wildlife habitat; enjoyment of native plants; threatened and endangered plant and animal species; outdoor laboratories; and solitude.

The existing management plan is more than ten years old. The Forest Supervisor has determined that significant changes have taken place since the implementation of the current management plan. The 1985 Caribou National Forest and Curlew National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan will be amended to show the Record of Decision for the Curlew National Grassland as a result of this analysis and revised Curlew National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan.

## THE PLANNING UNIT

The Curlew National Grassland (hereafter generally referred to as the "Grassland") is a portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Administrative Unit. Specifically administered as a part of the Westside Ranger District, the Grassland is situated in southeast Idaho, north of the Utah-Idaho State line. It encompasses approximately 47,600 acres of federal land intermixed with private land. It is located approximately 17 air miles west of Malad, Idaho. The Forest Supervisor's Office is located at 250 South 4$^{th}$ Avenue, Pocatello, Idaho 83201. (See Vicinity Map on the reverse side of title page.)

## TRIBAL TRUST RESPONSIBILITIES

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe has ancestral Treaty Rights on all public domain lands reserved for National Forest purposes that are presently administered by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The relationship of the United States government with American Indian tribes is based

on legal agreements between sovereign nations. The Fort Bridger Treaty of July 3, 1868 provided for the establishment of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. It also granted hunting and fishing rights to tribal members on "all unoccupied lands of the United States." These rights are still in effect, and management actions in this plan recognize valid rights. Consultation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council is required on land management activities and allocations that could affect these rights. Forest Supervisor Reese has consulted with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council regarding this amendment and Grassland Plan (FEIS, Chapter 6).

## FOREST SERVICE NATURAL RESOURCE AGENDA

On March 2, 1998, Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck unveiled the agency's Natural Resource Agenda for the 21st Century. The agenda focuses on four key areas:

1. Watershed health and restoration
2. Sustainable forest and grassland ecosystem management
3. Forest roads
4. Recreation

The Forest Service's natural resource agenda places a strong emphasis on watershed protection as the over-riding priority of forest and grassland planning and management. Protecting healthy watersheds and restoring degraded watersheds includes proposals for increasing stream and streamside restoration, habitat restoration for threatened, endangered and sensitive species, and abandoned mine reclamation.

Sustainable forest and grassland ecosystem management includes proposals for working with state, local and other partners to use criteria and indicators of sustainable forest and grassland ecosystem management to report on the health of all forested and grassland landscapes across the nation, both public and private, by the year 2003. Ensuring sustainable forests and grasslands requires the involvement of communities that benefit from, and care for, these lands.

The third key area of the agenda, forest roads, emphasizes management of the National Forest and Grassland road system. Roads are an essential part of the transportation system in many rural parts of the country. They help to meet recreation demands. They provide economic opportunities by facilitating the removal of commodities, which in turn provides jobs and revenue. Forest and Grassland roads provide access to conduct needed management. The agenda proposes four primary objectives for forest and grassland roads: (1) carefully considering decisions to build new roads; (2) eliminating old unneeded roads; (3) upgrading and maintaining roads that are important to public access; and (4) developing new and dependable funding for forest and grassland road management.

The fourth key area is recreation. Forest Service priorities in recreation will include providing premier settings and experiences for recreation users, improving customer satisfaction, emphasizing community outreach, and strengthening relationships with partners, communities and others.

## DECISIONS MADE IN A GRASSLAND PLAN AMENDMENT

The Grassland Management Plan establishes key decisions for the long-term management of affected National Forest System lands. These include:

1. Establishment of grassland-wide multiple use goals and objectives, including the description of the desired future condition (DFC). (36 CFR 219.11).

2. Establishment of grassland-wide management requirements (standards and guidelines to fulfill the requirements of 16 USC 1604 (The National Forest Management Act) applying to the future activities (resource integration requirements 36 CFR 219.13 to 36CFR 219.27)

3. Establishment of management areas and direction applying to future activities in that management area [resource integration and minimum, specific, management requirements found at 36 CFR 219.11(c)].

4. Determination of the suitability and potential capability of lands for producing forage for grazing animals and for providing habitat for management indicator species (36 CFR 219.20), designation of lands not suitable for such activities.

5. Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements found at 36 CFR 219.11(d).

6. Recommendation to Congress for Wilderness classification where 36 CFR 219.17 applies.

7. Establishment of rivers eligible for Wild and Scenic River consideration and recommendation to Congress of suitable rivers for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic River system in cooperation with the National Park Service as described at 16 USC 1271-1287, 26 CFR 297, and 47 FR 39454, September 7, 1982.

The authorization of project-level activities within the planning area occurs through project decision-making, the second stage of Grassland planning. Project-level decisions must comply with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures and must include a determination that the project is consistent with the management plan.

No decisions will be made concerning permitted levels of livestock grazing or site-specific allotment management practices. These concerns will be addressed in a separate NEPA analysis and decision, with public involvement and environmental effects disclosure.

The Grassland Plan provides the overall guidance (goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area direction) to achieve the desired future condition for the area being analyzed, and contains specific management area prescriptions for the Grassland. Specific goals of this proposal include:

- To develop direction for restoration of rangeland vegetation composition.

- To develop and implement livestock grazing standards.
- To develop soil and watershed management direction.
- To develop direction for sagebrush associated/obligate wildlife species habitat.
- To develop policy for future utility proposals.
- To develop management direction for riparian and upland resources.

## PROCESS USED TO IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

Many sources were used to identify the needs for change. Some principal sources of information included the following:

- Experiences in implementing the current management plan and working with the public.
- Public involvement in implementing projects.
- Need for management plan amendments as a result of implementing projects.
- Monitoring the effects of implementation.
- Understanding cumulative effects from implementing projects.
- Issues raised in appeals and litigation.
- Knowledge gained from research.
- Discussion with employees.
- Coordination and input from other federal agencies, state agencies, county governments and partners.
- Public feedback on values for the Curlew National Grassland.
- Results of assessments, such as Riparian Properly Functioning Condition and Vegetation Properly Functioning Condition.
- Changes in management policy for National Forest System lands.

From these sources, the Forest Service prepared an "Analysis of the Management Situation" (AMS) for the Curlew National Grassland (February, 1999). From the AMS the Forest Service identified current direction that needs to change. The Needs for Change in the AMS included the following:

**Soil:**

1. Develop and implement soil restoration direction for the Grassland.

2. Collaborate with area farmers, ranchers, Soil Conservation Districts, Natural Resource Conservation Service, on lands adjacent to the Grassland to encourage soil conservation and to restore riparian areas.

**Terrestrial Ecosystems:**

1. Establish a balanced multi-aged mosaic of sagebrush communities through regular planned treatments.

2. Maintain levels of forage productivity that will assist dependent grazing permittees while improving wildlife habitat quality.

3. Develop a prescribed fire plan that moves vegetation towards the desired range of future condition goals, maintains diverse shrub communities, watershed conditions, and reduces threats to private property and large acreages.

4. Develop and implement direction to restore, maintain, and improve habitats for sagebrush associated/obligate wildlife species, including sage grouse. This includes assessments of habitat fragmentation and connectivity.

5. Develop direction for treatment of those areas with an undesirable understory composition (e.g., bulbous bluegrass) to establish a diverse and desirable grass, forbs, and shrub composition.

6. Develop and implement grazing utilization standards for both seeded and native vegetation types that takes into consideration other resource values and needs.

7. Develop and implement policy for future utility proposals.

8. Clarify prescription direction to insure the proper future application of future uses and resource values.

**Aquatic Ecosystems:**

1. Develop strategies and implement direction to protect and improve riparian areas, wetlands and stream channels.

2. Develop watershed, riparian, wetland, and stream channel improvement strategies and direction.

3. Establish grazing utilization standards for riparian zones that will promote the establishment of deep-rooted plants and the stabilization of stream banks and channels.

The findings of the AMS, including the above "Needs for Change," were shared with the public, and public comment was solicited regarding the findings discussed in the AMS in 1999 (See Chapter 6, Public Involvement). These comments were incorporated into the description of existing conditions and were used in the development of alternatives.

## MAJOR AMENDMENT TOPICS

Taken collectively, these "needs for change" represent the major amendment topics for the Curlew National Grassland. Major amendment topics are those for which changes in resource conditions, technical knowledge, data improvement, or public opinion of national grassland resource management have created a need for change in management direction. Changes generally are important enough to affect large areas, change the mix of goods and services produced, and involve choices in management direction where there is no public consensus on the best course of action.

Regulations found at 36 CFR 219.12 (b) require the forest supervisor to determine the major public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities to be addressed in the planning process. The combined effect of the needed changes demand attention through plan revision or amendment. The major amendment topics described previously influenced the decision to amend management for the Curlew National Grassland and represent the major issues addressed in this document.

On May 3, 1999, the Forest Service published a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in the ***Federal Register*** to amend the management plan for the Curlew National Grassland. The federal notice initiated the formal public involvement process. In response to the federal notice and other public outreach efforts, the Forest Service received public comments to help further define the major revision topics. The following section describes the Desired Future Conditions, Proposed Action, and Purpose and Need for the Action.

## DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

The condition of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems is addressed through the desired range of future conditions (DRFCs) that address rangeland vegetation cover types, structures, disturbance patterns, and wildlife habitats; and with watershed processes, riparian conditions, and aquatic species habitats.

The desired range of future conditions is a vision of the long-term condition of the land, portrayed in the Proposed Action as a range of conditions, expected to result in 50 to 100 years if objectives are achieved. Other action alternatives may result in different long-term conditions,

or objectives may take longer to achieve.

**American Indians**

- Tribal treaty rights and other Federal trust responsibilities are met.
- Tribal governments are involved in Federal agency planning, decision-making, and implementation of programs.
- Agencies recognize the tribes' right to self-determination and control of their resources and their relationship both among themselves and with non-Indian governments, organizations, and persons.
- Functional restoration of the ecosystem provides the capability to support harvestable levels of species of interest to the tribes.
- Culturally significant items and sites are understood and treated within the context of the culture that identifies and values them.

**Soil**

- Most soils have at least minimal protective cover and soil organic matter. Soils have adequate physical properties for vegetation growth and hydrologic function.
- Soil quality, productivity and function are maintained or restored where needed.
- Soil hydrologic function and productivity in riparian areas is protected. Water quality buffering and regulation of nutrient cycling is maintained.

**Terrestrial Ecosystems**

- Vegetation and fuel management strategies reduce the risk of life and property loss from wildfire.
- Management is proactive to avoid introduction or spread of exotic and noxious weeds.
- The spread of noxious weeds is contained and ecologically sound methods of control are applied.
- Wildlife habitat is managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native species.
- Healthy, productive, and diverse populations of plants and animals are maintained or restored.

- Shrub communities are of sufficient size and of appropriate arrangement to enhance connectivity among similar habitats.

- Rangelands seeded with mixtures including predominately non-native plants are functioning to maintain life form diversity, production, nutrient cycling, energy flow, and the hydrologic cycle.

- Rangelands are in Properly Functioning Condition and reflect a mosaic of multiple-aged shrubs, forbs, and grasses with management emphasis on maintaining diverse plant communities.

- Seedings have been diversified by the addition of various desirable grasses, forbs, and shrubs that may include native species.

- Prescribed burning has maintained the diverse, mosaic shrub steppe plant communities. Most of the altered sagebrush steppe consists of diverse perennial plant communities.

- Early-seral sagebrush communities (0-5 percent canopy cover) occupy between 10 percent and 30 percent of potential sagebrush sites; mid –seral sagebrush communities (6 percent to15 percent canopy cover) occupy between 40 percent and 60 percent of potential sagebrush sites; late-seral sagebrush communities (greater than 15 percent canopy cover) occupy between 30 percent and 50 percent of the potential sagebrush sites.

- Established stands of undesirable species are replaced with desirable species.

- Long-term reduction of habitat fragmentation is accomplished through vegetation treatments.

- Seedings maintain and enhance native communities to meet livestock grazing needs as well as watershed and other resource values.

**Aquatic Ecosystems**

- In-stream water uses are protected and water quality is improved.

- Watersheds provide for natural infiltration, retention, and release of water appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate, and landform.

- Riparian/wetland vegetation structure and diversity are making substantial progress toward controlling erosion, stabilizing stream banks, shading water areas, filtering sediment, aiding in floodplain development, dissipating energy, delaying flood water, and increasing recharge of groundwater.

- Stream channels, riparian areas, and floodplains are functioning properly relative to the landscape, including gradient, size, shape, roughness, confinement, and sinuosity, and climate.

- Riparian soils support deep-rooted native and desired non-native vegetation to protect stream banks, filter sediments and maintain water tables.

- Roads exist in riparian areas only under the following circumstances: where needed for major public transportation thoroughfares, where they do not cause problems to aquatic and riparian resources, or where there are no other practical alternatives.

- Sediment regimes are appropriate to geology and climate settings. Elements of the sediment regime include the timing, volume, rate, and character of sediment input, storage, and transport.

- Aquatic habitat is managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native species.

## PROPOSED ACTION (From Notice of Intent)

The Forest Service proposes to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to document the analysis and disclose the environmental impacts of the proposed actions to amend the direction for resource management on the Curlew National Grassland (Grassland) as contained in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Caribou National Forest and Curlew National Grassland. The Grassland is located approximately 17 air miles west of Malad City, Idaho. The proposed actions are located entirely within the 47,600-acre Grassland.

The Proposed Action applies a riparian/wetland area prescription which establishes a zone of special emphasis that restricts activities to those which will not compromise prescription goals or reduce water quality below that needed to comply with state water quality requirements and sustain beneficial uses. Riparian forage utilization is not to exceed 30 percent or a 6-inch minimum stubble height, whichever is attained first, directly adjacent to the stream channel

The Proposed Action applies Grassland-wide upland forage utilization levels not to exceed approximately 50 percent on seeded sites (dry weight) and 45 percent on native vegetation sites (dry weight). The Grassland has been managed through allotment management plan direction to not exceed 60 percent forage utilization regardless of vegetation type.

The Proposed Action sets a goal of managing for a diversity of sagebrush canopy cover class ranges on the Grassland: 10 percent to 30 percent of the Grassland acres in 0-5 percent canopy cover; 40 percent to 60 percent of the Grassland acres in 6-15 percent canopy cover; and 30 percent to 50 percent of the Grassland acres in greater than 15 percent canopy cover.

Other vegetation management direction found in the Proposed Action includes an objective to treat 4,000 to 6,000 acres of dominant bulbous bluegrass sites, an undesirable grass species, and revegetate with desirable native and non-native grass, forbs and shrub species over a ten-year period. In addition to the treatment of bulbous bluegrass sites, the Proposed Action would treat,

over a ten-year period, between 1,000 and 3,000 acres of sagebrush with canopy cover greater than 15 percent. Vegetation treatments under the Proposed Action would total between 5,000 and 9,000 acres over a ten-year period.

The Proposed Action designates the Sweeten Pond and tree row areas as special wildlife areas and sets forth objectives to construct an additional impoundment in the Sweeten Pond area and establish an additional ten miles of tree rows over the next ten years. The Proposed Action provides guidance for the management of Forest Service designated sensitive species. The Proposed Action provides guidance for sage grouse habitat management, including deferring habitat manipulation practices within a 0.25-mile radius of active sage grouse leks, and provides for a seed mix that includes vegetation species preferred by upland birds during the pre-nesting, nesting and brood rearing periods, and guidance to provide residual cover to meet the needs of spring period ground nesting wildlife.

The Proposed Action includes the identification and development of monitoring protocols specific to Grassland resources.

The Proposed Action sets a goal to engage in collaborative efforts with adjacent landowners, Soil Conservation District and the Natural Resource Conservation Service to conserve soil, watershed and riparian resources.

## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose and need for the proposal is to amend existing and create new management direction for the vegetation, riparian, livestock grazing, wildlife and other resources and uses on the Grassland based on a proposed desired range of future conditions.

Direction from the Chief of the Forest Service requires that a separate management plan for each of the National Grasslands be developed. The Caribou National Forest proposes to complete an EIS to amend existing and create new management direction for the Curlew National Grassland. Current direction is found in the 1985 Land and Resource Management Plan for the Caribou National Forest and Curlew National Grassland.

The EIS addresses ecological patterns, processes, and management direction for both riparian and upland resources; develops direction for restoration of rangeland vegetation composition; develops and implement livestock grazing standards; develops soil and watershed management direction; develops and implement direction for sagebrush associated/obligate wildlife species habitat; and develops policy for future utility proposals. The amendment will include ecosystem management goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring strategies specific to the Grassland.

## OTHER AMENDMENT TOPICS

Other topics identified as important to the public, such as fossils, heritage resources, air quality, developed and dispersed recreation, and wildfire suppression are addressed through this amendment process but were not considered major amendment topics.

Travel management was not identified as a need for change in the "Analysis of the Management Situation" or through public scoping efforts; however, through the analysis process, two internal concerns arose regarding travel management on the Grassland:

1. The direction under the National Forest Management Act at 219.21 (g) to address off-road vehicle use.

2. District personnel requested this analysis address the need to close areas currently open to off-road vehicle use in some alternatives.

## OTHER TOPICS RAISED BUT NOT ADDRESSED

The public and other agencies raised a number of additional topics and issues that are not addressed in detail in this Final Environmental Impact Statement. Such topics either require departmental, legislative actions, or come under the authority of other governmental agencies, and as such, are outside the scope of the EIS. These topics include, but are not limited, to the following:

**Department and Legislative Topics**

- Grazing fee levels
- Primacy of livestock grazing on national grasslands

**Other Governmental Agency Topics**

- Predator control
- Mormon Cricket/Grasshopper control

**Forest Service Topics Addressed at the Project Level**

- Establishment of livestock stocking rates (to be established through the allotment management planning process).

## ISSUES/PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the planning process, the interdisciplinary team (IDT) gathered public input on issues, the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action. The scoping process included a public meeting, briefings with interested stakeholders, letters and updates, and the development of a web homepage. These activities were used to identify the issues, alternatives and concerns

to be considered in the development of a Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan and to keep the public informed and involved throughout the planning process. (See Chapter 6 for a full discussion of public involvement activities.)

Three significant planning issues were identified through this public process: Riparian and Watershed Management, Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat Management, and Social and Economic Factors. Issue indicators were assigned to show the differences between alternatives.

**What is an issue indicator?**

Key issues described below were the driving factor for the development of alternatives to the Proposed Action. All issues and "needs for change" are addressed in each alternative to varying degrees. These issues and their indicators constitute the determining factors for alternative comparison in the DEIS. Issue indicators are units of measure that show how the issues are addressed in each alternative. The Interdisciplinary team, in collaboration with the Forest Supervisor and Westside District Ranger, developed the issue indicators.

## ●Issue 1 - RIPARIAN AND WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

**Watershed Condition**

Watershed conditions on portions of the Grassland are below potential and need to be improved through restoration of natural soil protection features including microbiotic crusts (mosses, lichens, cyanobacteria, cryptogams and liverworts) and reestablishment of protective perennial vegetation and litter.

**Issue Indicator**: Maximum acres disturbed at any one time during 10-year plan period.

Estimated potential erosion in tons per year over natural erosion rates based on treatments proposed in each alternative

**Riparian Condition**

Many stream channels and riparian areas on the Grassland have been degraded and need to be improved to attain properly functioning condition.

**Issue Indicator:** Miles of stream at or moving toward a riparian properly functioning condition.

## ●Issue 2 - VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

**Sagebrush Canopy Cover**

Some commentors advocate a reduction in sagebrush canopy cover to maintain/increase forage production (sagebrush canopy cover less than 15 percent). Other commentors advocate that sagebrush canopy cover is currently not adequate to meet sage grouse nesting and wintering habitat needs (sagebrush canopy cover greater than15 percent). Still others advocate that sagebrush canopy cover should be managed for properly functioning condition (10-30 percent of sagebrush acres in 0-5 percent canopy cover; 40-

60 percent of sagebrush acres in 6-15 percent canopy cover; 30-50 percent of sagebrush acres in greater than 15 percent canopy cover).

**Issue Indicator:** Percent of Grassland acres in each of the following canopy cover classes:

0-5 percent sagebrush canopy cover
6-15 percent sagebrush canopy cover
Greater than 15 percent sagebrush canopy cover

**Mountain Brush Management**

Some commentors advocate that mountain brush communities (serviceberry and bitterbrush) be preserved or maintained at current densities and conditions for nesting upland species and big game. Some contend mountain brush communities should be managed in a healthy matrix (multiple ages and structures) using whatever tools are appropriate. Historically these vegetation types have been managed with prescribed fire, chaining and herbicides.

**Issue Indicator:** Percent of mountain brush communities in early and mid/late age classes.

**Vegetation Understory Composition**

A. Bulbous bluegrass is a non-native, sod-forming species which provides for watershed stability. However, bulbous bluegrass has low value for wildlife habitat and livestock forage. Some commentors advocate bulbous bluegrass should be replaced with more desirable species.

B. Some commentors advocate that treated areas should be reseeded with native grasses, forbs and shrubs (primarily sagebrush) to benefit wildlife. Historically, treatments have been reseeded with non-native species (primarily crested wheatgrass) to assure vegetation establishment and to benefit livestock.

**Issue Indicators:**

Part A: Acres of bulbous bluegrass treated to improve understory composition
Part B: Number of acres reseeded or interseeded using native species, including sagebrush as part or all of the seed mix.

**Wildlife Habitat Management**

A. Sagebrush communities in the Curlew Valley have been converted to other uses resulting in habitat fragmentation and reduced connectivity for sagebrush dependent and associated species. The size and location of future vegetation treatments within the Grassland have the potential to further affect connectivity and fragmentation. Some commentors advocate that sagebrush treatments should be "small scale" (less than 20 acres) to reduce the impacts to wildlife species (including sage grouse) and

promote re-establishment of sagebrush. Historically, sagebrush treatments have been on the scale of hundreds of acres (fields) for efficiency.

B. Some commentors contend that the current livestock use level (~60 percent) provides sufficient forage for the current stocking levels and sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse nesting habitat. Others contend the use level is too high and should be reduced to provide higher quality sage and sharp-tailed grouse habitat.

C. Prescribed fire is currently used to meet a variety of resource objectives. Some commentors contend that the use of prescribed fire is inappropriate for sage grouse habitat management. Others contend prescribed fire is the preferred tool to meet resource objectives.

D. Grassland management has the potential to affect native and desired non-native wildlife population viability.

E. Some commentors contend that tree rows harbor sage grouse predators. Others contend that tree rows provide other values including wildlife habitat.

**Issue Indicators:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Part A: | Percent of sagebrush acres in potential Sage grouse nesting habitat (16-24 percent sagebrush canopy cover) at the end of first decade. |
| Part B: | Whether the alternative "meets," "partially meets," or "does not meet" the most current version of the Idaho State Sage Grouse Management Plan. |
| Part C | Acres of sagebrush in greater than 15 percent canopy cover treated using prescribed fire during the decade. |
| Part D | Riparian viability analysis protocol on the preferred alternative (See Appendix J for the Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation.) |
| Part E | Miles of tree rows on the grassland at the end of the first decade. |

## ●SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

**Economic and Social Values**

A. Changes in Grassland management may have social and economic effects such as impacts on jobs, income, and county revenues.

B. The cost of maintaining a level of livestock head-months should be justified by the monetary benefits.

C. The cost of bulbous bluegrass treatments should be justified by the monetary benefits.

**Issue Indicators**:

| | |
|---|---|
| Part A: | Changes in jobs<br>Changes in income<br>Estimated federal payments to Oneida County<br>(Includes PILT, 25% Fund and Bankhead-Jones payments) |
| Part B: | Financial Efficiency Analysis for costs and revenues by alternative<br><br>Estimated Annual Grazing Program Costs, Revenues, and Benefits by alternative |
| Part C: | Economic Efficiency Analysis for costs and revenues by Alternative |

**Reserves/Preserves**

Several commentors advocate managing a significant portion of the Curlew National Grassland as a "reference reserve" or a "fish, wildlife and plant preserve." Currently most of the Grassland is managed for a variety of uses including livestock grazing. A small portion of the Grassland is currently managed exclusively for wildlife (Sweeten Pond area & tree rows) and no livestock grazing is allowed.

**Issue Indicator:** Acres managed without livestock grazing (unsuitable acres)

**Livestock Grazing**

Some commentors contend that current livestock grazing utilization levels are adversely affecting the sustainability of plant communities and watershed stability. Others contend that the current livestock grazing utilization levels (~60 percent) is providing for sustainable plant communities and other resource values.

**Issue Indicator:** Estimated permitted livestock numbers measured in **potential** head months based on estimated forage production, utilization levels and treatments in each alternative.